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AUTHOR Prior, Warren
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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by reviewing public reports on citizenship education for pre-service teachers, experienced teachers, and school students that were issued in Australia during the 1980s. The reports show a nationwide push toward a greater emphasis on political literacy. Because of this emphasis, it is important to discuss the role history teachers can and should play in this movement. For a study of student teachers at a university in Victoria, a questionnaire was administered to a random sample of student teachers, and results were compiled for the total student cohort and for the history method student teachers. Students were given questionnaires designed to test their factual knowledge about politics and questions designed to explore their attitudes about the role of teachers in taking political or social action and in educating students for political literacy. It was found that the students in general had poor knowledge of politics, and that history/social education student teachers fared somewhat better. It also was found that the student teachers generally equated the political literacy of students with knowledge about institutions, and did not think it proper for teachers to use their role to engage in social or political action. For the sake of the future of the humanities, and history in particular, in Australia, is important to address the issues of the political literacy and the training and proper role of history teachers in that county and to do so quickly. A 12-item list of references is included. (DB)

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"JUST WHAT IS A GOOD CITIZEN ? "

Political Literacy and the Implications for Teachers of History.

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Warren Prior

Faculty of Education

Deakin University

SO 022 462

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Just What is a 'Good Citizen'?

"What did you learn in school today
Dear little boy of mine?
I learned our government must be strong,
It's always right and never wrong,
Our leaders are the finest men,
And we elect them again and again,
And that's what I learned in school today,
That's what I learned in school."

Tom Paxton (USA: 1960s)

Throughout the 1980s in Australia there have been numerous public reports on the place and purpose of what is often loosely called "citizenship education" for pre-service teachers, experienced teachers and school students. The Auchmuty National Inquiry into Teacher Education (1980), for instance, argued that all teachers needed to be equipped with a sound knowledge of how their country was governed. The Blackburn Report (1984) and the Ministerial Paper No. 6 (1984), both in Victoria, the Gilding Report in South Australia, the CRASTE Report ,' Windows on the World' (1988) all repeated similar recommendations found in the Auchmuty Report.

At the school level too there have been advocates throughout the 1980s of the need for students to be at least more actively aware and preferably more actively involved in their own society. The Social Education Framework P-10 (1987) in Victoria advocated major citizenship goals. Students, it argued, firstly should know about their own society, and then they should aim for active participation and social action. One characteristic of a socially educated person was seen as

> ".... being curious and critically aware of their social world and accepting an obligation to keep themselves informed about significant issues." (p.9)

Almost identical aims can be located in the SSABSA Australian Studies Framework and the "Common Knowledge" Guidelines, in the P-10 Social Education Framework in Queensland and in the Core of the Tasmanian Australian Studies syllabus. This is not the place to examine the origins and the motivations behind the developmemt of these common Australia-wide curriculum but a reading of the courses clearly indicates the significant influence of the Victorian Social Education Framework of the early 1980s. I will not even attempt to enter into the political agendas, although as Fien has noted, education for moral and active citizenship has long been part of the rhetoric of educational poilicies and programs in Australia. (Fien,1:1990)

The Australian media first became interested in the nature and role of citizenship education when it discovered the phenomenom of what it saw as politically ignorant, alienated and apathetic adolescents in the wake of the March 1983 Federal elections. A research report conducted on behalf of the Australian Electoral Office had shown that the young were amongst those in the community who were least likely to be interested in politics.

The AEO research report, based on data gathered in June 1983, revealed :

- an almost universal lack of confidence among unenrolled young Australians that their vote would matter.
- distrust and dislike of politicians and political parties.
- a feeling that the education system was to blame for their ignorance.
- dissatisfaction with government bureaucracy.

In 1986, the Commonwealth Schools Commission Report referred to

> " ..... the health of our democracy depends on all citizens, through education, having the best possible understanding of how society functions and how, individually and collectively, citizens can participate in, and contribute to, its future."

In March 1988 the Senate requested its Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training to conduct an inquiry into "Education for Active Citizenship in Australian Schools and Youth Organisations". Senator Terry Aulich, the Chairperson of the Committee noted that a major aim of education for active citizenship should be to provide students with :

(1) an understanding of how government works (at the Commonwealth, State and Local levels)
(2) an appreciation of the role of community groups and non-government organisations
(3) motivation to be active citizens.

Of the six recommendations in the February 1989 Report was one concerning pre-service teacher education. The Committee recommended :

> "That the Commonwealth ask all higher education institutions with responsibility for teacher education to ensure that education faculties recognise the importance of education for active citizenship and make provision for it as a component in pre-service courses, particularly for those teacher education students who are likely to teach in social stiudies and related areas of the curriculum." (4,p48)

One practical outcome was the first Parliamentary Education for Teacher Educators Conference in October 1989 and the establishment of an Australian wide network of interested teacher educators.

Two other recommendations referred to the role of schools :

> " That the Commonwealth designate education for active citizenship as a priority area for improvements in primary and secondary schooling..." (2,p33)

and

> " ...the Commonwealth designate education for active citizenship as a priority area for expenditure on in-service education." (4,p49)

The high profile of the Parliamentary Education Office at this conference supported by the outstanding quality of the teaching materials produced by the PEO, is further evidence of the Commonwealth Government 's focus on political literacy in schools, even if it could be argued it is approaching the issue from a particular ideological position. More on this later.

Still more recently, in April 1989, the Australian Education Council in The Hobart Declaration on Schooling noted as part of the ten common and agreed National Goals for Schooling,

> "To develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context."

Most recently in Active Citizenship Revisited, (surely the most rapid revisit of any Senate inquiry!) a further report of the same Senate Standing Committee on Employment , Education and Training, March 1991, attempted to assess the effectiveness of initiatives and developments in curriculum and policy since the first Report in 1989. It is interesting to note a less institutional approach to political literacy in the recommendations to schools. As expected the Committee recommended the ongoing development of school resources and networking of teachers , but also

> "....that schools provide training and other assistance to student representatives on school councils to enable them to maximise the opportunities offered them to contribute to school governance..."

To the Australian Education Council, the Committee recommended that :

> " The Commonwealth and State Ministers of Education jointly commission regular national surveys of the political knowledge, attitudes and orientations of young people...."

To Higher Education Institutions the Committee recommended that :

> " ....that teacher training institutions place due emphasis on active learning, critical reflection and community involvement in their courses at both primary and secondary level."

There are probably other State reports that I have missed, but the above reports when viewed as a whole clearly demonstrate an on-going and consistent support for some form of active citizenship training in schools.

Despite the reminder that education for citizenship has long been part of the rhetoric of education policies and curriculum in Australia (Lewis,1987), the 1980s has to be seen as the decade of revival on a grand scale. Or is it just History repeating itself?
Some interesting broad questions worthy of further investigation might be :

* Who are the individuals/groups promoting citizenship education and what are their motives?

* What form(s) of 'citizenship education' is being promoted?

* To what extent is this trend originating from grass roots initiatives and interests?

* What is it about the 1980s which appears to have given rise to the resurgence of interest in citizenship education?

More specifically, these reports often raise questions about the most appropriate areas of the curriculum to redress deficits in political literacy. Some reports point towards a separate area of the curriculum while other reports favour a cross-curricula approach. Most reports however put forward the opinion that it is the 'Humanities' departments in schools which should assume leadership of political literacy programs. And given the nature of the materials coming out of the Parliamentary Education Office which in many ways exemplifies the particular approach and definition given to political literacy in the Senate' 'Active Citizenship"Report, it is reasonable to assume that History/Social Education teachers have been targeted as assuming leadership roles in the promotion of political literacy.

What do we see as our role as teachers of History in this Australia wide push toward a greater emphasis on political literacy?

The Political Education of Beginning Teachers of History

As an interested reader of many of these reports over the past few years , my Head of Faculty supported a submission for a modest research grant to investigate the extent of political literacy among our final year student teachers. I had initially planned to focus only on History student teachers, but the value of a random sample of final year students from across all teaching background area proved to be too tempting in terms of a comparative study. Would it be reasonable to expect that History/Social Education student teachers are more politically literate than students from other teaching areas? Or, more to the point, should they be more politically literate?

The following summary of findings firstly examines the total student cohort and then focuses on one group - History method student teachers.

[I have some copies of the questionnaire schedule if anyone would want a copy. One immediate reaction could be that it is very long and there may well be an exhaustion factor. Perhaps too I have got the emphasis too much linked to factual recall of incidental knowledge. I would appreciate any comments as I plan to rework the questionnaire to sample another group early next year.In the long term I have begun the process of a cross cultural study with a colleagues in Japan and USA.]

Deakin University Student-Teacher Profile

The questionnaire asked for some details about the students' background. No attempt is made here to particularise students at Deakin and given the rather random reasons why students do enrol at the Rusden Campus it is reasonable to assume that these students are 'typical' of the total student teacher cohort. Some characteristics of the random sample were :

1. The average age of final year B. Ed. students is 23 years, the average age of Dip. Ed. students is 28 years.

2. There are approximately double the number of females to males in the sample of 96 students.

3. There are approximately double the number of exit State school students compared to exit Private(incl. Catholic) school students.

4. The breakup of teaching areas indicates 25% Social Education/History,25% Maths, 30% Personal Development, and 20% Dance/Drama.

5. Most (80%) indicated that they had no opportunities given to them for participating in any form of decision-making while at school.

6. Most (90%) had at least 'some' discussions at home during their adolescent years of politics and current events.

7. Only a minute number, perhaps 2%, had taken part in some form of political activities during their University course and/or outside in the community.

What can you say? If these are typical student teachers who hope to enter teaching, their own school and tertiary experiences do not provide any positive models for attitudes about active citizenship and participatory decision making. The role of family discussions about current events could be seen as a useful resource for ideas for active citizenship, although the nature of the discussions is unclear . Perhaps we as teachers are being conned by the general view of adolescents in the home and classrooms as the great "grunters" and non-communicators. Forgetting for the moment the issues of who actually initiates the discussions about current events at home and whether teacher trainees can typically represent the general adolescent group, there is some hope in thinking that in some homes at least family members still do talk to each other. Perhaps we as teachers underestimate the nature of these discussions and their potential for exploration in class. Not wishing to take this point too far, several classroom activities with the co-operation of parents, with some structured monitoring of current event discussions, like television ratings schedules, might reveal a more active interest in political education.

Some Findings from the Deakin University questionnaire .

1. Final year student-teachers' knowledge about 'Politics'.

Using a simple point scoring system, a calculation was made of the factual recall component of student teachers' knowledge about politics.

On a global assessment it is clear that final year student teachers have only a very limited knowledge, with an average score of only **24 / 45** correct on the factual recall section. Males were significantly better than females at recalling this data.

The highlighting of some of the 'worst' areas of knowledge responses is not motivated by attempt to denigrate the cohort. It is to ask ourselves as teachers of History and as near- future colleagues of these final year student teachers : "Does it really matter?" Does it really matter if these mostly young beginning teachers have major gaps in their knowledge in what might be considered by some as essential understandings by any socially educated person? Percentages are given, together with some light-hearted attempts at explanations)

* 60% only could name the Australian Governor-General, (of these, 10% spelled his name incorrectly!)

* 20% only could name the present Victorian Minister of Education (perhaps not so serious given our high turn-over of Ministers, but a serious blow to their egos!)

* !0% only could reasonably describe the Westminster system of government (perhaps there are not too many role models of the system in politics today!)

* 10% only could draw a reasonable chalkboard diagram representation of how legislation becomes law (perhaps this says more about the decline in the use of chalkboards by beginning teachers!)

* 30% only could correctly name the whole ten countries on the map of Asia (perhaps this is not our fault, with the blame directed at Geography teachers!)

When breaking down the student cohort into teaching areas some variations in the success rate was evident. History/Social Education student teachers in all sections - name recall, conceptual understanding and mapping recall - were better able to recall what might be considered incidental knowledge. History/SE students scored an average of **29 / 45**. They were, on average, better able to recall names, approximately 50% could locate the ten countries on the map, but only about one-third demonstrated reasonable conceptual understanding of political terminology.

Is it a cause for concern when beginning History teachers cannot locate China on a map; or place Canberra (or even spell it correctly!) in Australia; are unable to name the Governor-General or the date of Australia Day; and are almost universally unable to draw a simple diagram to illustrate how legislation becomes law?

2. Final year student-teachers attitudes about ' political / social action' activities of teachers.

The training of student teachers is, of course, not only about being able to recall incidental pieces of information or what might often be described as 'research evidence'.

In this unprocessed and often random form of experience, student teachers may be competent in recalling the technical aspects of teaching, but will, by and large, be uncritical and lacking in what might be called the moral judgement area in teaching. (see Fien,)

Another section of the questionnaire was aimed at assessing what final year student teachers considered to be the nature of their role, as what I would call, social activists. The underlying ideology is not just re-active to social issues but can be reasonably described as pro-active in which the teacher moves beyond an objective analysis of contentious issues to an encouragement for students to initiate 'social action.' Kirk (Kirk,1986) has called this paradigm of teacher education a radical or critical approach. Most of the recent State curriculum statements or Frameworks in the Social Education area strongly argue for an inquiry/ investigatory teaching and learning methodology and incorporate a number of outcome statements about broad understandings about society.There is considerable agreement among these State curriculum documents about these broad understandings. The most common groupings include :

Change
Environment
Cultures and Groups
Decision making and Systems.

There is obviously considerable overlap between these areas and it is inconceivable to see them outside of the social, economic and political contexts in which they operate. Most of the curriculum statements also refer to four areas of objectives - knowledge,skills, attitudes/values and social action.

What then is the role of **History** teachers in addressing this "Common" knowledge?

What then is the role of teachers in the area of "social action"?

And how far have we come from thre position of the Victorian Education Department of 20 years ago when regulations stated :

> "The Education Department has consistently required that teachers should avoid comment on controversial political issues or upon religious matters in the course of their teaching."

Using a Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree grid, the questionnaire asked final year student teachers to give their opinion on a number of issues relating to the teaching and learning of potentially controversial topics.(see questionnaire)
A summary of the findings suggests that final year student teachers believe that:

* they should avoid comment upon 'controversial' issues and religious matters in the course of their teaching.

* the wearing of political party badges is inappropriate at school.

* schools should regularly conduct patriotic ceremonies.

* secondary school students should study the Australian Constitution and the workings of the political system.

* classrooms can provide a model for democratic decision making.

* but that joint participatory social action, arising out of an issue being investigated, in the form of joining students in activities like a peace march is an inappropriate activity for teachers.

An examination of History student teachers revealed little differences in attitudes to the general student cohort.

Is it a cause for concern when beginning teachers of History appear to support an institutional approach to political literacy with its concurrent institutional view about decision making in classrooms? Is it also a concern that our future colleagues appear to favour a non-critical and non participatory approach to social issues?

What are the implications of these findings for the teaching of History?

Perhaps you agree with the views of these students. The curriculum statements in general, but particularly the one from Victoria, I believe go the one step further from an objective rational examination of controversial social issues to supporting a critical approach which encourages moral judgements. In Victoria this is usually referred to as a "social justice' perspective. It is similar to the arguments that Connell et al (Connell:1982,208) has made.

> " Education has fundamental connections with the idea of human emancipation.....In a society disfigured by class exploitation, sexual and racial oppression, and in chronic danger of war and environmental destruction, the only education worth the name is one that forms people of taking part in their own liberation....It is equipping people with the knowledge and skills and concepts relevant to remaking a dangerous and disordered world."

Student teachers in general see the 'liberation' of youth and the value of participatory democracy in terms of knowledge about institutions. History student teachers in particular see that this can be done by inquiry learning but in an objective sense with little recognition of social action or the value of experiences in critical moral judgements. Nowhere does there appear to be a pro-active perspective of social issues or a consideration of what the future might or could hold.

Some conclusions about the teaching of History in Victoria based on the findings from the questionnaire and on my observations of History classes.

1. This paper is not making the claim that political literacy is the essential ingredient to the successful teaching of History. It has however hopefully raised the debate about the "common knowledge" or "common understandings about society" so often expressed in many State Social Education curriculum documents. If beginning History teachers, at the point of entry into teaching, lack understandings and presumably interest in many aspects of common knowledge, and then in the same breath, claim that the very same common knowledge is essential for their students, then it is a depressing picture.

Isit possible for us as teachers of History to agree on common knowledge?

Can we agree that understandings about a body of knowledge is an end in itself in the teaching of History?

What is the role, if any, of teacher training institutions in broadening the extent of student teachers' common knowledge?

2. Another concern is the particular brand of common knowledge that History student teachers appear to support. In labelling it 'conservative' I am motivated by Fien's conception of politics in the Senate's Report , "Education for Active Citizenship". The recommendations from both the Senate Committee and from my own questionnaire endorse a conservative institutional view of common knowledge in a political arena in which democratically legitimate groups make decisions on behalf of a broad constituency. All too often I observe History classes in which an institutional perspective is the only one given. Nor is the perspective of personal politics or a feminist viewpoint evident anywhere.
If we view the value of History for adolescents in terms of enabling them to make some sense of their world, in enabling them to see their place in it and in enabling them to see possible better futures, then this narrow institutional perspective is inappropriate. It is largely for adults, (that is male adults), and about adults exercising and distributing of power.

How important is the study of political institutions in our History courses?

How can History courses encompass broader perspectives, including feminist, personal, Aboriginal, etc.?

3. If we want our students to be more responsible for their own learning and to be active citizens then opportunities should be given to them in the 'safety' of their schooling, a sort of trial run before 'real life'. School remains an important agent of political socialisation for adolescents. Student teachers (80%) reported that they had had no opportunities for participating in decision making during their schooling, whether this be in the form of Student Representative Councils or in classroom activities.

The organisation and the way we manage our History classes and the range of roles that students play in them does have an impact on students' attitudes to politics , their self-perception and their willingness to to be either passive or active independent learners. Zevin (1983) has found that the extent of willingness of students to consider active participation in classroom decisions depends not so much on what is taught but rather on the style of teaching and the way the classrroom is organised- the classroom climate. The inclusion of such activities in History classes as class elections, group meetings, mock Royal Commissions, class setting of procedures, etc. as examples of participatory activities can contribute to more positive attitudes to political litercacy.

An initial and limited investigation of a sample of 1991 exit History student teachers now teaching in schools in 1992 has indicated that they have already adopted much of the style of teaching which, by and large. they received when they were school students. In other words, nine months after beginning teaching and mostly after the initial traumas of the survival period have gone, they appear to offer few opportunities for their students to actively participate in decision making in their classes. So much for the intervention of teacher training!

Do we value students taking an active part in decision making in our History classes?

Should History teachers consciously become role models for participatory decision making ?

Can History courses incorporate classroom activities in which students are given opportunities to experience and exercise power?

4. It is via the through- time perspective that the study of History contributes to common knowledge. History teachers readily acknowledge this focus but then in an effort to equip students with such things as 'essential' skills lose sight of the big picture. All too often History teaching has minimal relevance to assisting students to discover who they are, when they are, and what they and their community might be. The rhetoric of participatory decision making with students becoming responsible for their own learning in light of evidence and experiences gained by themselves and from others is just that , rhetoric. History classes should be at the forefront in examining the human factor- including the distribution of power and decision making in all its contexts, the systems of social organisations, culture and ideologies in societies and the relationships with the natural environment.

The Last Few Words

It has been the intention of this paper to raise some issues relating to the training of History teachers, the extent of impact of the recent reports on political literacy on History teachers ,and ,in general, the sort of outcomes we want from the teaching of History. In Victoria if we as History teachers don't address these issues, and quickly, the future of the humanities and in particular History in the new Victorian Certificate of Education is indeed dismal.

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